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SUBJECT: NETANYAHU'S RIGHT GETS LOUDER, BOLDER

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¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Following a tour of illegal outposts by four cabinet ministers on August 17 (reftel), and ahead of Netanyahu's expected meeting in London next week with Senator Mitchell, some right wing members of the government have continued to up their rhetoric in support of settlements and against the Israeli left. This included support from Likud and coalition members for a high-profile and controversial visit to Israel by former candidate for the Republican presidential nomination and former Governor of Arkansas Mike Huckabee, whose said the purpose of his trip was to support settlements, including in East Jerusalem. In addition, Vice Prime Minister and Minister for Strategic Affairs Moshe Ya'alon, speaking to an extreme right-wing Likud faction that has opposed Netanyahu's party leadership, reportedly referred to the Israeli left as a "virus," attacked the media, said the Supreme Court was authority without responsibility, called for a complete cut-off of humanitarian support to Gaza, and reiterated that Jews should be able to live anywhere in the Land of Israel. The Prime Minister's Bureau was quick to distance the PM from Ya'alon's remarks, releasing a statement that "The remarks made by Minister Ya'alon are unacceptable, neither in their essence nor in their style, and do not represent the government's stance." Netanyahu seems to have put the issue to rest after a meeting he had with Ya'alon the evening of August 20. END SUMMARY.

Huckabee Helps Right, Settlers Grab the Spotlight

¶2. (SBU) During the evening of August 17, at least one Knesset member, MK Tzipi Hotovely (Likud), co-hosted a dinner for former candidate for the Republican Presidential nomination and former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee at the disputed Shepherd's Hotel in East Jerusalem. The event was sponsored by the messianic, pro-settlement group Ateret Cohanim, and funded by American millionaire Irving Moskowitz. Huckabee said that the purpose of his trip was to show American support for settlement expansion, including in East Jerusalem, and to let Israel know that not all Americans support the administration's stand opposing settlements. Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon (Yisrael Beiteinu) also met with Huckabee during his trip.

YAALON: NOT JUST WHAT HE SAID BUT WHERE HE SAID IT

¶3. (SBU) However, the Israeli media gave far more high profile coverage to remarks reportedly made by Minister Ya'alon, who as Vice Prime Minister is designated as the number two official in the government. The headlines were dominated on August 20 by a leaked speech Ya'alon gave over the weekend to the Jewish Leadership Forum, an extreme right-wing Likud faction led by Moshe Feiglin, who has opposed Netanyahu's party leadership. NOTE: Following the Likud primary last year, Netanyahu changed the rules for forming the Likud party list to ensure Feiglin would not get a seat in the Knesset.
END NOTE.

¶4. (U) During the speech, Ya'alon reportedly said that the media has power over the Prime Minister and that they "influence public discourse in a distorted, mendacious, manipulative and deceptive way." He also said the Supreme Court, along with the elites and the media, are "focal points of power with authority but with no responsibility. That isn't democratic. They have no responsibility. They don't give any accounting." He reiterated his point that some outposts are not illegal and should be legalized, saying that "the Jews need to live everywhere in the Land of Israel forever. On Gaza, he said "we need to disengage completely from the Gaza Strip. . .not electricity, not water, not vegetables and not fruit. Neither a supply of food nor money." He called Peace Now a "virus" and said that the Israeli left has seriously damaged the strategic interests of Israel. Ya'alon, a former IDF Chief of General Staff, also was quoted as saying that whenever Israeli politicians bring doves of peace, the army has to clean up after them and that he was "not afraid of the Americans."

¶5. (U) Public response was swift, including from the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister's Office released a statement that "Minister Ya'alon's statements are unacceptable to the Prime Minister, both in substance and in style, and do not represent the government's position." However, after a meeting that Netanyahu and Ya'alon held the evening of August 20 at which Netanyahu was supposed to reprimand Ya'alon, the Prime Minister's bureau indicated the issue was settled. According to press reports, Ya'alon said his comments were taken out of context, for example he called Peace Now's actions a virus and not the people of Peace Now, and underlined that he did not intend to go against the PM or his policies. This is not the first time Ya'alon has caused problems for the Prime Minister. Earlier this month, he threatened to resign if amendments were not made to a land reform bill that was a pet

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issue for Netanyahu.

¶6. (U) Even after the meeting between the PM and Ya'alon, Finance Minister Yuval Steinitz (Likud), a former Peace Now activist who was injured during a deadly hand grenade attack on a Peace Now rally in 1983 by a right-wing extremist, expressed concern about the statements: "I am also opposed to some of the actions of Peace Now, no less than Ya'alon, but I am firmly opposed to the use of dangerous and severe phrases such as viruses." (NOTE: An editorial in Yedioth Ahronoth points out that the perpetrator of the 1983 attack also called Peace Now a virus. END NOTE.) Steinitz added that he is sure Ya'alon regrets the statements.

¶7. (U) The spokesperson for the opposition Kadima party responded to Ya'alon's speech by saying that "these are Netanyahu's true colors. . . the vice prime minister shattered into pieces Netanyahu's deception and illusion policy and proved where the government is really headed. As long as he is a member of the government, what Netanyahu says outside doesn't matter. What matters is what he promised Boogie [Ya'alon's nickname] inside. The Bibi-Boogie-Feiglin axis endangers Israel's interests and the ability to reach an agreement maintaining them."

¶8. (SBU) COMMENT: Ya'alon is a controversial figure who was forced out of the command of the IDF by Sharon over his opposition to the Gaza disengagement. During the election campaign, Netanyahu recruited Ya'alon to join Likud, made him Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Strategic Affairs, and then appointed him as a member of his inner cabinet of six. In our contacts with Ya'alon, he has been careful not to appear anti-U.S. or to go beyond his well-publicized views that peace with the Palestinians will require years of bottom-up reform of Palestinian society and institutions. Now that Ya'alon appears to be maneuvering to position himself as a leader of Likud's right wing opposition to concessions, Netanyahu probably regrets his decision. The opposition Kadima party, for its part, likely appreciated the opportunity to use Ya'alon's remarks to link Netanyahu with Feiglin, who is considered an extremist in mainstream Israel. END COMMENT.

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